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The Daily 202

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Kirsten Gillibrand's trip to Georgia

showcases the changing politics of abortion for Democrats in 2020

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) speaks at a March rally near the Trump International Hotel and Tower in New York. (Julius Constantine Motal/AP)

BY JAMES HOHMANN
with Joanie Greve and Mariana Alfaro

THE BIG IDEA: Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) will

hold a campaign event today inside the Georgia State Capitol to protest the flurry of antiabortion bills that have been passing in red states.

“I'm going to Atlanta to lead the fight against these unbelievable, draconian inhumane abortion bans,” the presidential candidate said during an interview yesterday afternoon. “As I've watched this, I have become more and more concerned that we not only need to shine a light on it and lift up the voices of women who will be impacted, but that I have to lead this fight. So I'm going to take it right to the lion's gate. I'm going to take it right to the belly of the beast.”

Georgia’s governor signed a bill last week that would outlaw abortion after a "fetal heartbeat" is detected — which usually happens about six weeks following conception, before many women even realize they are pregnant. Mississippi, Kentucky and Ohio have recently passed similar measures.

Missouri’s state Senate passed a bill early this morning that would ban abortions after eight weeks. The GOP-controlled House is expected to pass it swiftly, and the Republican governor says he’s waiting with pen in hand to sign it. The bill makes no exceptions for rape or incest.

Gillibrand’s visit to Georgia also comes the morning after Republican Gov. Kay Ivey in neighboring Alabama signed the most restrictive abortion law in the country. Doctors

could be imprisoned for up to 99 years if they perform an abortion. Likewise, there are no exceptions for women who were raped or the victims of incest.

-- Gillibrand, who is scheduled to meet with abortion providers, activists and state legislators before giving a speech, said most Democrats have become more direct when talking about reproductive rights than they were a few years ago. There's less throat clearing than there used to be. Very few politicians use the "safe, legal, and rare" talking point that was so standard during the Bill Clinton era.

"As a party, we should be 100 percent pro-choice, and it should be non-negotiable," Gillibrand said. "We should not settle for less, and if our party cannot support women's basic human rights, their fundamental freedoms to make decisions about their bodies and their futures, then we are not the party of women. … I will not compromise on women's reproductive freedom."

The senator attributes the more strident tone to the fact that more women are participating in politics, and they are more passionate about protecting their rights than the men who used to call the shots in the party. "I think women's voices are being heard now more than ever," said Gillibrand. "Women are feeling self-empowered. I don't think they're going to take excuses anymore, and I don't think they're going to support

candidates that don't believe they should get to make those fundamentally personal decisions."

To break through in such a crowded field, other presidential candidates have also centered their campaigns on one overarching issue. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee talks nonstop about combating climate change. Rep. Eric Swalwell (D-Calif.) focuses on gun control. Tech entrepreneur Andrew Yang's big idea is a universal basic income. For spiritual guru Marianne Williamson, it's reparations for the descendants of slaves. For Bernie Sanders, it always comes back to Medicare-for-all. For Elizabeth Warren, it's using a 2 percent wealth tax on everyone worth more than $50 million to pay for a battery of ambitious new programs, including universal child care.

But no one else is talking about reproductive rights nearly as much or as forcefully as Gillibrand. She said that abortion comes up constantly on the campaign trail and has "in every state I've visited." All the major 2020 contenders spoke out yesterday against the new laws in Alabama, Georgia and elsewhere, but Gillibrand is the first to travel to the region specifically to emphasize her opposition.

"Young women are deeply concerned because their lives are at risk," she said. "This is their ability to control their bodies, their basic human rights, their basic civil

rights as individuals to decide when they're having children, how many children they're having and whether they will have them safely. These are issues that are life-and-death issues for women, and they should not be demeaned and undermined so much that they're not allowed to make these most personal decisions themselves.”

Margeaux Hartline, dressed as a handmaid, proterts on Tuesday outside of the State House in Montgomery, Ala. (Mickey Welsh/The Montgomery Advertiser via AP)

-- Gillibrand announced last week that, if elected, she will appoint only judges who will uphold *Roe v. Wade* and protect reproductive rights. She notes that these states have all been controlled by Republicans for years, but they're passing these laws now in direct response to Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court. He replaced Anthony Kennedy, who provided the decisive fifth vote that preserved *Roe v. Wade* in the 1992 case of *Casey v. Planned Parenthood.* Antiabortion activists are confident, based on his track record as a judge on the D.C. Circuit and as a conservative legal activist, that he'll be with them when it counts.

President Trump pledged in 2016 that he would appoint only antiabortion justices to the Supreme Court. He said his appointees would "automatically" overturn *Roe*. At one point, he even said that women should be punished for seeking abortions before walking that back. Putting out lists of judges he would consider for the Supreme Court helped gin up turnout among social conservatives who were otherwise skeptical of him. In a close election, anything can be called pivotal. But it doesn't seem like a stretch to say that this might have been decisive.

In their futile efforts to stop the confirmation of his judicial nominees through the GOP-controlled Senate, Democrats have relentlessly attacked Trump for promising he would appoint only anti-abortion judges. **I pressed Gillibrand**

on whether her litmus test is therefore hypocritical. Her answer essentially boiled down to the fact that Trump broke the dam, and there's no going back now. Gillibrand, a lawyer by training, nodded to the importance of judicial independence. But she essentially argues that the high court has already become politicized and wonders why Democrats would maintain the fiction that justices are somehow impartial when it comes to one of the most charged issues in society. She believes that voters have a right to know with certainty that who they're supporting for president will appoint judges who will take a certain position on abortion.

"First of all, the fact is that President Trump has made it his mission to overturn *Roe v. Wade*," Gillibrand said. "He's changed the entire landscape of the judicial system. Certainly, Mitch McConnell did that by stealing the Merrick Garland seat. It's a new level of threat, and it is not a drill. It's something that every American woman, and every American family that cares about women, should be well aware of."

Anti-abortion activists protest outside of the Supreme Court during the March for Life in January. (Jose Luis Magana/AP)

-- Gillibrand's liberal colleagues in the Senate are stopping short of saying they'll impose this kind of litmus test on judicial nominees. Campaigning in New Hampshire yesterday, for instance, Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) would only go so far as to say that upholding *Roe* would be a "significant factor" in her deliberations. The former California attorney general also said that she

would consider adding as many as four more seats to the Supreme Court to change the balance of power while expressing interest in imposing term limits on justices and limiting the number of nominees any particular president gets to pick. “I’m open to this conversation about increasing the number of people on the United States Supreme Court,” she said.

Gillibrand defended herself by noting that it’s not unreasonable to demand that judges uphold precedent. “Every single one of those justices said that they would hold up precedent. I'm concerned they lied, and I'm concerned they won't,” she said. “So I'm going to be very direct: I believe in precedent, I believe in the precedent of *Roe v. Wade,* and any judge that I will nominate to be a Supreme Court justice or to be a judge on any court will be a pro-choice judge who will uphold the precedent of *Roe v. Wade*.”

The senator sees much of the energy on her side in the abortion debate as stemming from Trump’s 2016 victory, despite the “Access Hollywood” video, and the #MeToo movement that’s followed. “A lot of this rebirth of the women's movement is a direct response to electing President Trump, who has more than a dozen sexual assault allegations against him and clearly doesn't value women and particularly women of color,” she said. “They've been fighting and marching since President Trump became president. You saw it in the women's

marches globally, and then you saw it again in 2018 with the number of women who ran and won and voted. I think everything is changing, and it's changing in the red places and the purple places. Our breakthrough elections were all in the red and purple districts and with purple state governors." (Trump has denied all the allegations of sexual misconduct.)

Gillibrand highlighted the victories of Democratic women in the midterms like Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in Michigan. Whitmer has promised to veto bills that passed Michigan's legislature on Tuesday to ban a common second-trimester abortion procedure. The bills would prohibit physicians from performing abortion by dilation and evacuation except to save a woman's life.

-- The senator says that these debates allow female candidates to make the case that there should be more women at the table. In Alabama, all 25 of the votes that were cast in favor of the abortion bill in the state Senate were from white Republican men. Women account for 51 percent of Alabama's population but hold only 15 percent of the seats in the state legislature. In Georgia, women hold 72 of the 236 seats in the state legislature. That's just less than a third.

"It's vital because most men, particularly white men, cannot imagine what it would be like to not have full constitutional rights and full freedoms," Gillibrand

said. “They can't possibly imagine someone else telling them about how many children they're going to have and what's going to happen to their body in a life-or-death situation whether you are going to have a child. I don't think men in America can fully understand what it's like to be told your body is not your own. And that some legislator from far away who knows nothing about you gets to make that decisions. Having a child is a serious, not risk-free, decision. There's a lot of maternal mortality in this country. Women sometimes have very hard pregnancies.”

What Alabama's abortion legislation could mean for the rest of the country

-- To be sure, it's not just the Democratic women who are stopping abortion bills. The Wisconsin State Assembly yesterday passed a bill addressing what happens during the rare situation when a baby is born alive during a failed abortion attempt. But Gov. Tony Evers (D), who defeated Scott Walker in November, has promised to veto the measure when it passes the GOP-controlled state Senate. Pennsylvania's Democratic governor, Tom Wolf, has also pledged to veto a bill that

passed the state House on Tuesday to outlaw abortions because of a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome.

-- Last year's General Social Survey showed that 2 in 3 Democrats said a woman should be able to have an abortion for any reason, compared with 35 percent of Republicans. A Pew poll published last September found that 58 percent of Americans said abortion should be legal in at least most cases, compared with 37 percent who said it should be illegal in all or most cases. That top-line number has stayed consistent over the past few decades, though other polling shows that most Americans shy away from absolutism on both sides of the abortion debate.

-- While the national debate has sharpened and polarized, by no means do all Democratic politicians support abortion rights. Especially in the South. Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards (D), who is up for reelection in November, has indicated he will sign a "heartbeat bill" that's moving quickly through the state legislature that prohibits abortion as early as the sixth week of a pregnancy. The bill, introduced by a Democrat, passed out of the state House's health committee yesterday without objections. It's written so that it can go into effect only if a federal appellate court upholds a nearly identical law in Mississippi. That's designed to minimize litigation costs for the state.

-- But there are also Democratic officeholders in red states who are taking a stand against the post-Kavanaugh laws. The Democratic district attorney of Salt Lake County in Utah, for example, announced yesterday afternoon that he will not enforce an 18-week ban that was just enacted statewide. The two abortion clinics in the state are both in his jurisdiction. District Attorney Sim Gill said he thinks the law is unconstitutional, so prosecuting doctors who perform abortions would be inappropriate.

‘I believe it is the will of the people’: Missouri governor voices support for abortion

ban bill

-- These latest bills are pushing the debate toward territory where Democrats can more clearly prevail politically. “Until recently, Republicans have been on offense on the issue of abortion, deploying a similar playbook to the one Democrats are now using by calling their opponents extreme due to a recent law passed in New York that expanded access to abortions late in a pregnancy,” Michael Scherer and Felicia Sonmez report. “In his State of the Union address this year, Trump pointed to the New York law and comments by Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam (D) about a proposed abortion bill to argue that Democrats supported efforts to ‘allow a baby to be ripped from the mother’s womb moments before birth.’ … But on Wednesday, Trump did not mention the new legislation in Alabama, Georgia and Ohio.

“**The Trump reelection campaign referred questions about the Alabama bill to the White House, which declined to comment on the bills specifically.** … And several Republican senators such as Martha McSally (Ariz.) and Thom Tillis (N.C.), who are facing tough reelection fights, avoided the issue as best they could. ‘That’s a state issue. I’m focused on my work here,’ McSally said in a hallway interview at the U.S. Capitol. Tillis dodged in a similar encounter: ‘I’m going to leave it to the folks in Alabama how to govern that state.’ Even Alabama’s senior senator distanced himself from Republicans in the state legislature.”

-- Gillibrand said Democrats ought to speak unapologetically even in the reddest areas about their absolute support for abortion access. She defeated a Republican incumbent in a ruby red House district in 2006 and was later appointed to the Senate in 2010. Her positions have shifted on guns and immigration as she represented a blue state, but she's been consistent on abortion.

"The truth about women's reproductive freedom is that one in four women are going to need an abortion service in their lifetime," Gillibrand said. "With that rate of prevalence, it means most people – if not every person – knows someone who has needed those health-care services in their lifetime. It is not something that is unique. It is something that is basic health care for many Americans, and we should make sure it's available and safe. … I believe this is something that women and men who love women will support."

‘All human life is precious’: What the Alabama governor has said about abortions so far

THE LEGAL FIGHT AHEAD:

-- As Gov. Kay Ivey (R) signed the Alabama bill into law, activists on both sides girded for protracted litigation. Emily Wax-Thibodeaux and Chip Brownlee report from Montgomery, Ala.: “As a crop duster with a banner saying ‘Abortion is okay’ hummed above the capitol, circling back and forth around the governor’s mansion, a group of women below let out a cheer. ‘Just

another day in Alabama,' said Mia Raven, director of People Organizing for Women's Empowerment and Rights (POWER) House. Women's rights activists and abortion rights advocates said the decision to approve the nation's strictest abortion measure has energized them. … Though not demonstrating in the streets, Alabama's antiabortion base — which recently helped define the state as pro-life at the ballot box — took solace in the fact that the state's ban on abortion set a new restrictive standard. …

"**Ivey said she recognizes that the bill might be unenforceable because of *Roe v. Wade*, and she said that 'we must always respect the authority of the U.S. Supreme Court even when we disagree with their decisions.'** She said the sponsors of the bill 'believe that it is time, once again, for the U.S. Supreme Court to revisit this important matter, and they believe this act may bring about the best opportunity for this to occur.' … **The bill's sponsor, Rep. Terri Collins [R], said it is intended to serve as a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade***. She said she hopes the bill will establish that personhood begins at conception."

-- The five conservative justices are more likely to chip away at *Roe* through smaller blows than by invalidating the precedent in one fell swoop. The New York Times's Adam Liptak reports: "As soon as Monday, the court could announce whether it will hear challenges

to three provisions of Indiana abortion laws on issues like the disposal of fetal remains and an 18-hour waiting period after state-mandated ultrasound examinations. The court will in the coming months almost certainly agree to hear a challenge to a Louisiana law that could reduce the number of abortion clinics in the state to one. The Alabama bill … is a different kind of measure, one that squarely conflicts with *Roe*. …

"**Because the [John] Roberts court tends toward incrementalism, it is not likely to want to take on a direct confrontation with that precedent. Nor in all likelihood will it have to.** Lower courts will almost certainly strike down the Alabama statute and other direct bans on abortion … Since the Supreme Court controls its own docket, it can simply deny review after lower courts strike down laws squarely at odds with Roe."

Alabama Senate passes nation's most restrictive abortion ban

-- Roberts' cautious approach is being tested in the Indiana case. The justices will meet behind closed doors again today for the 14th time to deliberate on what to do. The Los Angeles Times's David G. Savage reports: "The high court's action — or so far, nonaction — in Indiana's case gives one clue as to how the court's conservative majority will decide the fate of abortion bans recently passed by lawmakers in Alabama and Georgia. … Roberts' history, along with the court's handling of

abortion cases in recent years, suggests he will not move to overturn the right to abortion soon, or all at once, and is particularly unlikely to do so in the next year or two with a presidential election pending."

The Indiana law in question was signed in 2016 by then-Gov. Mike Pence: "In October, a week after Kavanaugh was sworn in, Indiana's lawyers asked the high court to hear the case and uphold the law … Normally, the justices consider such an appeal for a week or two. If at least four of them vote to hear the appeal, the case is granted a full review. If not, it is denied in a one-line order. Since Jan. 4, however, the court has repeatedly relisted the case of *Box vs. Planned Parenthood* for reconsideration."

-- Televangelist Pat Robertson, who helped lead the rise of the religious right in the 1980s and 1990s, said Alabama's "extreme" new law has probably "gone too far" to withstand legal scrutiny. "They want to challenge *Roe vs. Wade*, but my humble view is I don't think that's the case I'd want to bring to the Supreme Court because I think this one will lose," he said. "God bless them. They're trying to do something." (Sarah Pulliam Bailey)

-- Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp (R), who signed the bill into law, has postponed a trip he was supposed to take to Los Angeles next week to promote the state's

film industry. He was concerned about mass protests and the possibility that studio chiefs would cancel meetings. His spokesman said he'll try again in the fall to go out west. Despite threats to cancel production in the state that's become known as "the Hollywood of the South," thanks to generous tax incentives, there has not yet been follow-through.

MORE ON 2020:

-- New York Mayor Bill de Blasio announced on ABC's

“Good Morning America” that he will run for president. Michael Scherer reports: “He plans to travel to Iowa and South Carolina this week for a series of introductory campaign events. … As a late arrival to the race, de Blasio might not qualify for the first Democratic presidential debate in June, which requires earning 1 percent in three public polls, or receiving 65,000 donors from at least 20 states by June 13. … In a party that prizes diversity, de Blasio becomes the 14th white male candidate for president.”

-- With de Blasio and Montana Gov. Steve Bullock in, there are now 23 Democratic candidates who have declared for president. That’s enough for two football teams, with one left over to play referee. “So many Democrats are running for president that the chair of the National Governors Association, the mayor of America’s largest city and the senior senator from Colorado may not even qualify for the first debate — even though it allows for 20 candidates,” Scherer reports. “Some Democratic leaders worry privately that this army of candidates makes it harder for the party to coalesce around a single standard-bearer, and deliver a clear message, in time to mount the strongest possible campaign against a president they urgently want to defeat. And for the candidates, the landscape makes it increasingly difficult to strategize, stand out and make their case. Fourteen of the candidates polled below 2 percent in the last CNN national poll.”

-- Joe Biden's campaign headquarters will be in Philadelphia. He will make a formal announcement during a rally on Saturday afternoon at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. (John Wagner)

-- Bullock said he raised $1 million from donors in all 50 states in the first 24 hours of his presidential bid. But his campaign did not disclose the number of donors, a figure necessary to land Bullock in the first debate next month. (CNN)

-- Kamala Harris said she won't participate in a Fox News town hall. "They've reached out, but we haven't entertained it," a Harris campaign spokesperson said. (CNN)

-- Pete Buttigieg signed two of Barack Obama's 2008 ad-makers. Larry Grisolano and John Del Cecato of AKPD Message and Media are joining the South Bend, Ind., mayor's team. (Politico)

-- Rep. Tusli Gabbard (D-Hawaii) said she would drop criminal charges against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Edward Snowden if elected. (Newsweek)

-- Amy Klobuchar gave an interview to Elle about the sexism she's experienced. "A memory I have is from when I'd been in the Senate for a few months," the

senator from Minnesota said. “I was on the elevator with two of my staff members. The door opened, and a male senator was standing outside. He said, ‘Excuse me, this elevator is for senators only.’ My staff member said, ‘She is a senator.’ And then I looked at him and asked, ‘But who are you?’ I knew exactly who he was. The elevator door closed, and he never got on. He’s no longer there.”

-- Stacey Abrams, who recently passed on running for Senate in Georgia, explains why she’s focused on fighting voter suppression in an op-ed for the New York Times that doesn't give away whether she'll run for president: “Across the country, voter purges employ an easily manipulated ‘use it or lose it’ rule, under which eligible voters who exercised their First Amendment right to abstain from voting in prior elections can be booted off the rolls. Add to this mix closed or relocated polling places outside the reach of public transit, sometimes as far as 75 miles away, or long lines that force low-income voters to forfeit half a day’s pay, and a modern poll tax is revealed.”

-- Trump’s advisers and appointees are attracting an unusually high number of complaints over accusations that they violated the Hatch Act, which prohibits them from using their government jobs to campaign for the president's reelection. Politico’s Anita Kumar reports: “A Trump appointee displayed a 'Make America Great Again' hat at her Housing and Urban Development office. A top official at the Office of

Management and Budget used his official Twitter account to promote the campaign slogan. And White House Counselor Kellyanne Conway delivered a scathing and unprompted attack on Trump's potential opponent, Joe Biden, during a TV interview. … Increasingly, the public — and, watchdog groups say, the Trump administration — merely shrugs at such activities, representing another political norm trampled during the president's tenure. It's concerning advocates who say the rise in complaints reflects broader ethical lapses in the Trump administration, including staffers spending staggering amounts on travel, promoting the president's businesses and failing to file legally required financial reports."

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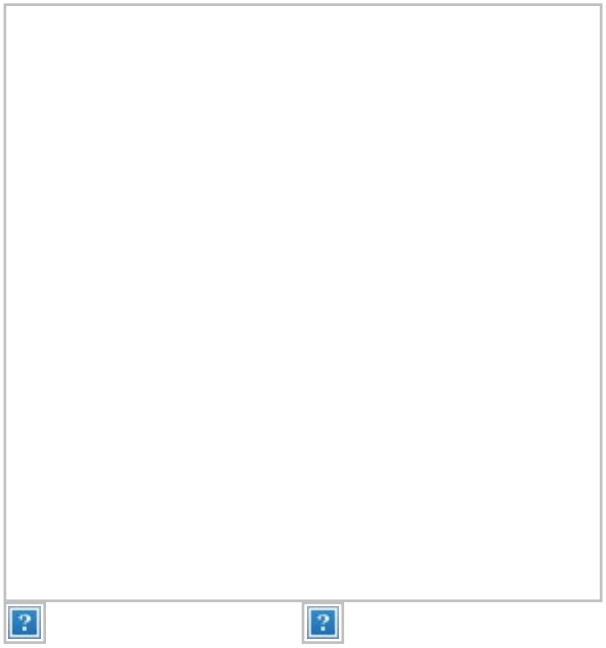
WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING:

Former media mogul Conrad Black arrives at a business luncheon in Toronto. (Mark Blinch/Reuters)

-- Trump pardoned billionaire Conrad Black, a longtime friend who wrote a glowing book about the president that described him as having "a firm belief in common sense and the common man." Colby Itkowitz reports: "Black was convicted in 2007 on fraud charges, including alleged embezzlement, and obstruction of justice. He served more than three years in prison and

was deported to his native Canada after he was released in 2012. He was barred from returning to the United States for 30 years. The White House said in a statement that Black was ‘entirely deserving’ of the pardon. In listing Black’s accomplishments, it mentions biographies Black wrote about presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Richard Nixon, but not his tome on Trump. … **Trump also fully pardoned Patrick Nolan, a former Republican state legislative leader [in California] who pleaded guilty to public corruption charges in 1994 and served nearly three years in prison.”**

-- A Republican legislator in Michigan was indicted on charges of trying to trade his vote for cash and then lying about it to the FBI. A federal grand jury accused state Rep. Larry Inman of attempted extortion, bribery and lying to FBI agents after he reportedly solicited money, over text message, from the Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters and Millwrights. Inman denies wrongdoing and rejected calls from GOP leadership for his resignation. (Reis Thebault)



What you should know about the new ‘Juuling’ trend

GET SMART FAST:

1. **North Carolina became the first state to sue the e-cigarette maker Juul.** The Tar Heel State accuses the company of causing addiction by “deceptively downplaying the potency and danger of the nicotine.” North Carolina is asking a state court to apply a marketing and advertising ban that would prevent Juul from trying to sell its products to minors. (Deanna

Paul)

2. **The Food and Drug Administration is set to approve a second treatment for infants afflicted with spinal muscular atrophy and the drug is expected to become the most expensive drug in the world.** The expected approval of the drug — which is expected to have a price tag of $1.5 million to $5 million — has sparked a market battle between its manufacturer, Novartis, and Biogen, the maker of the first treatment. (Christopher Rowland)

3. **Georgetown University said it would expel two students linked to the college admissions scandal.** The announcement came the same day that Georgetown student Adam Semprevivo filed a federal lawsuit to try to prevent the university from imposing sanctions against him after his father pleaded guilty to charges linked to the scheme. (Nick Anderson)

4. **A federal judge blocked a new U.S. policy for distributing livers for transplant patients, arguing that patients in less-populated areas would suffer if the rules were kept in effect.** The new policy would offer livers to patients as far as 500 nautical miles from the donor, potentially benefiting patients in cities in New York but increasing shortages in smaller towns. (Lenny Bernstein)

5. **New York's Met Museum will no longer accept**

gifts from members of the Sackler family amid outrage over the family's connections to the opioid crisis. The Sacklers, who are linked to the maker of OxyContin and are one of the world's most prolific philanthropic families, have also been blacklisted by the Tate Modern in London and the Guggenheim in New York. (New York Times)

6. **Lawyers who have sued the Boy Scouts of America contend that the number of abusers who infiltrated the organization's ranks far exceeds the 7,819 figure cited in a recent analysis.** The national organization, which still has assets of more than $1 billion, is considering filing for bankruptcy protection as it faces a massive number of payouts to abuse victims. (Los Angeles Times)

7. **Investigators concluded that equipment operated by Pacific Gas & Electric Co. is to blame for last year's Camp Fire.** PG&E has agreed with this determination, which found that California's deadliest wildfire originated from electrical transmission lines near the community of Pulga, about 100 miles north of Sacramento. (Michael Brice-Saddler)

8. **A new study found that women who followed low-fat diets were less likely to die of breast cancer.** Breast cancer experts praised the news that women could make lifestyle changes to help combat the

disease, but some noted that the findings did not show a low-fat diet could reduce the risk of developing breast cancer, which was the original question the study was designed to address. (Laurie McGinley)

9. **Both suspects in the Colorado school shooting will be charged as adults.** Devon Erickson, 18, and Alec McKinney, 16, are facing dozens of charges connected to the attack on a STEM charter-school shooting in suburban Denver. (Corey Hutchins)

The aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln transits the Suez Canal in Egypt. (U.S. Navy/AP)

TEHRAN WATCH:

-- Trump is frustrated with some of his top advisers, who he thinks could rush the United States into a military confrontation with Iran and shatter his long-standing pledge to withdraw from costly foreign wars, according to several U.S. officials. From John Hudson,

Shane Harris, Josh Dawsey and Anne Gearan: “Trump grew angry last week and over the weekend about what he sees as warlike planning that is getting ahead of his own thinking, said a senior administration official with knowledge of conversations Trump had regarding national security adviser John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. ‘They are getting way out ahead of themselves, and Trump is annoyed,’ the official said. ‘He is not comfortable with all this “regime change” talk,’ which to his ears echoes the discussion of removing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein before the 2003 U.S. invasion.

“**Trump prefers a diplomatic approach to resolving tensions and wants to speak directly with Iran’s leaders.** … Trump is not inclined to respond forcefully unless there is a ‘big move’ from the Iranians, a senior White House official said. ... On Wednesday morning, the president attended a Situation Room briefing on Iran. ...

“**Pentagon and intelligence officials said that three distinct Iranian actions have triggered alarms**: information suggesting an Iranian threat against U.S. diplomatic facilities in the Iraqi cities of Baghdad and Irbil; U.S. concerns that Iran may be preparing to mount rocket or missile launchers on small ships in the Persian Gulf; and a directive from [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and regular Iranian military units that some U.S. officials have interpreted as a

potential threat to U.S. military and diplomatic personnel. U.S. and European officials said there are disagreements about Iran's ultimate intentions and whether the new intelligence merits a more forceful response than previous Iranian actions. ...

"**Trump's anger over what he considered a more warlike footing than he wanted was a main driver in Pompeo's decision last weekend to suddenly cancel a stop in Moscow and on short notice fly instead to Brussels,** where he sought meetings on Monday with the European nations that are parties to the Iran nuclear deal … Pompeo's visit was meant to convey both U.S. alarm over the recent intelligence on Iran and Washington's desire for diplomacy, not war. But **European leaders, who have been watching the febrile atmosphere in Washington with alarm, have not been convinced, according to conversations with 10 European diplomats and officials from seven countries.** Pompeo 'didn't show us any evidence' about his reasons Washington is so concerned about potential Iranian aggression, said one senior European official who took part in one of Pompeo's meetings. …

"**Anxieties over the heightened threat environment spilled over into Capitol Hill on Wednesday during a classified briefing.** Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) argued that the intelligence warranted an escalation against Iran, said one person with knowledge of the briefing. In

response, Democratic Rep. Seth Moulton (Mass.) accused her of exaggerating the threat in what the person described as a ‘very heated exchange.’”

-- The Iraqi government has been warning militias tied to Iran to refrain from provoking the U.S., fearing another war on its land. The New York Times’s Alissa J. Rubin reports: “There are about 30 militias in Iraq with at least 125,000 active-duty fighters and varying loyalties. Many worked in tandem with the Iraqi military in fighting the Islamic State, and all report to the prime minister’s office. The concern in Iraq is focused on the handful of groups with strong ties to Iran. Several are close to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps and have members who trained in Iran.”

Trump talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in 2017. (Andy Wong/AP)

THE CHINA CRISIS:

-- The Commerce Department is adding Chinese communications giant Huawei and its affiliates to a U.S. trade blacklist. Damian Paletta, Ellen Nakashima and David J. Lynch report: “This listing makes it virtually impossible for companies to survive once U.S. firms are

discouraged from doing business with them. The Commerce Department said it had reached this decision because Huawei 'is engaged in activities that are contrary to U.S. national security or foreign policy interest.' ... The listing, which takes effect in the coming days, forces Huawei and its affiliates to obtain a U.S. government license to buy American technology. … Huawei smartphones use the Android operating system. With this listing, Google would be barred from exporting Android to Huawei unless it got a waiver from the Commerce Department. The chips in the phones are also made by U.S. companies, which would need waivers to sell to Huawei, said an official familiar with the matter."

-- China criticized the move, saying it will "resolutely safeguard" Chinese companies. From the AP: "A foreign ministry spokesman, Lu Kang, criticized 'abuse of export control measures' on Thursday … Lu said Beijing will take 'further measures to resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese enterprises' but gave no details."

-- China also accused two detained Canadians of espionage, raising the prospect of harsh punishment for the men caught in the Huawei feud. Gerry Shih reports: "China's Foreign Ministry confirmed that prosecutors charged Michael Kovrig with 'gathering state secrets and intelligence for overseas forces' and Michael Spavor with 'stealing and providing state secrets to

overseas forces.' The men were charged 'recently,' ministry spokesman Lu Kang said without giving more specific timing. … In the last six months, the timing of Chinese action against Canadian citizens has reinforced suspicions that Beijing is targeting a close American ally in retaliation for what China says is an unfair American effort to hobble Huawei and seize one of its executives — a campaign that it says is aided and abetted by the Canadian government."

-- A Dutch spy agency is investigating whether Huawei has a hidden "backdoor" on the network of a major Dutch telecoms firm. The backdoor would reportedly make it possible for Huawei to access customer data. The Dutch intelligence agency AIVD is looking into whether the situation allowed spying by the Chinese government. (Reuters)

-- The National Association of Manufacturers ripped Marco Rubio for his comments in yesterday's Daily 202. The senator from Florida criticized CEOs and businesses for agreeing to bad China deals, short-term thinking and not investing enough in U.S. workers. "The senator's comments were unfortunate," emailed Jay Timmons, the president and CEO of NAM. "China's unfair trade practices have for years harmed the American economy and America's manufacturing workers, in particular. To revise history and blame American companies for China's behavior is completely

misinformed. It also ignores the difficult business environment that we endured for so long. Until recently, manufacturers in America faced the highest tax rate in the developed world and stifling regulatory uncertainty, which often made it difficult to invest in the United States. With a new, competitive tax code and modernized regulations in place, manufacturers saw the strongest American job creation in more than two decades in 2018.

“**Interestingly, Senator Rubio joined Democrats in the final days of the tax reform debate to call for a higher tax rate on manufacturers**, which would have undermined this progress,” Timmons added. “Instead of blaming American business – and trying to make it harder to do business in America – Senator Rubio should work with manufacturers and the administration to secure a lasting, enforceable trade agreement with China to level the playing field and grow manufacturing in the United States.”

-- Dan DiMicco, the chairman of the Coalition for a Prosperous America and the chairman emeritus for Nucor steel, emailed to praise Rubio’s comments. "U.S. economic policy needs to focus on prioritizing investment and growth for the benefit of U.S.-based industry, including jobs and wage levels for American workers,” said DiMicco, who was also a trade adviser on Trump’s 2016 campaign. “The new report by Senator Rubio is making an important contribution in that direction

by calling attention to the lack of investment in U.S. manufacturing industry in the last several decades and offering a way forward. Companies should be run not purely for shareholder benefit, but for the benefit of all the participants in the business. This is how we managed Nucor, and in the 15 years that I was CEO it grew to be the largest steel company in the U.S. and never had a layoff."

-- Trump is preparing to make available up to $20 billion in additional aid for farmers to help offset losses from China's retaliatory tariffs, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said. Politico's Catherine Boudreau and Ryan McCrimmon report: "'Our calculations initially probably range between $15-and-$20 billion,' he said of the estimated economic damage to farmers and the scope of the potential aid package, but he reiterated that many details are still being decided. Perdue also said USDA was taking into account feedback from last year's trade aid package. Some commodity groups like corn and wheat growers were not pleased with the amount of assistance their farmers received under the plan. … In terms of timing, Perdue didn't give an estimate of when the plan would be announced, but he said USDA was 'expediting' its work at [Trump's] request. The secretary said the program would comply with WTO limits on agricultural subsidies. Perdue said the money could once again be funneled through the Commodity Credit Corporation."

-- During a presentation about China and trade offered to House Republicans, Larry Lindsey, the former top economic adviser to President George W. Bush, said he asked two psychologists to evaluate Trump from afar and they found that the president is a "10 out of 10 narcissist." Colby Itkowitz and Mike DeBonis report: "'That's what he scored,' Lindsey said, clarifying this wasn't just his opinion. Lindsey continued with more armchair psychology, diagnosing Trump's behavior as a symptom of his upbringing and a mother who didn't pay enough attention to him. … The riff on Trump, first reported by Politico, lasted about two minutes as part of a longer presentation on China. Lindsey was otherwise complimentary about how Trump has handled the trade conflict. Lindsey also shared a character analysis of Chinese President Xi Jinping, calling him a 'sociopath.' He described the two nations' standoff as 'existential' and said neither country can win so the U.S. has to stay tough. ... Members in attendance did not attempt to challenge Lindsey's characterization of Trump, aides said."

-- A tanker carrying Iranian fuel oil in violation of American sanctions unloaded its cargo into storage tanks in China, according to tracking data. Potential buyers, wary of U.S. sanctions, steered clear of the tanker's cargo for months. (South China Morning Post)

What 'contempt of Congress' could mean for Barr

THERE'S A BEAR IN THE WOODS:

-- White House Counsel Pat Cipollone issued a broad rejection of requests for records and testimony from Trump staffers, telling House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler (D-N.Y.) that Congress has no right to a "do-over" of special counsel Bob Mueller's investigation. Carol D. Leonnig, Josh Dawsey and Rachael Bade report: "In his letter, Cipollone repeated a

claim the White House and Trump's business have begun making — that Congress is not a law enforcement body and does not have a legitimate purpose to investigate the questions it is pursuing. But Cipollone stopped short of asserting executive privilege. Instead, he told Nadler he would consider a narrowed request if the chairman spelled out the legislative purpose and legal support for the information he is seeking. … In an interview, Nadler called the White House argument 'preposterous.'"

-- Most colorful moment of the day: At an event outside the Capitol to honor slain law enforcement officers, **Bill Barr approached Nancy Pelosi.** The House speaker joked last week about locking up members of the Trump administration in "a jail down in the basement of the Capitol." According to a person who witnessed the exchange, **the attorney general shook Pelosi's hand and said loudly so others could hear, "Madam Speaker, did you bring your handcuffs?" Pelosi smiled and responded that the House sergeant-at-arms was present should it be necessary to arrest anyone.** Barr chuckled and walked away. (Felicia Sonmez, Rachael Bade, Matt Zapotosky and Ian Shapira)

-- Pelosi told Democrats in a closed-door caucus meeting yesterday to stick to their policy agenda ahead of the 2020 election rather than initiate impeachment proceedings. And not a single lawmaker challenged her. Rachael Bade and Mike

DeBonis report: “The events underscored that Pelosi has managed to hold the line on her no-impeachment stance despite Trump’s ongoing resistance and relentless liberal pressure for Democrats to try to oust the Republican president. Most notably, she has quelled an internal clamor and kept even the most vocal impeachment proponents and eager investigators in check as Democrats increasingly look to the courts to settle the fight between Congress and the chief executive. In the nearly hour-long session heavily focused on health care, Pelosi was the only one to bring up impeachment, acknowledging that some Democrats are complaining.”

-- Barr said he’s not blocking Mueller’s testimony to Congress. The Wall Street Journal’s Sadie Gurman reports: “‘It’s Bob’s call whether he wants to testify,’ Mr. Barr told The Wall Street Journal Wednesday, en route to El Salvador, a trip focused on increasing international cooperation against the violent street gang MS-13, which has roots in both Central America and the U.S. ‘I’m trying to break away from Washington and do the real work of the attorney general,’ he said. … The visit to El Salvador is Mr. Barr’s first trip since taking office. Much of his time thus far has been occupied by the Mueller report and testifying about it before Congress."

-- Republicans hope to see the end of the Senate Intelligence Committee's Russia probe as soon as possible now that Donald Trump Jr. has agreed to

testify. Politico's Marianne Levine and Burgess Everett report: "With [Trump Jr.] agreeing to an interview with the Senate Intelligence Committee after a brief but explosive fight over Chairman Richard Burr's subpoena, Republicans see the committee's two-year bipartisan investigation into Russian interference winding down. 'We're near the end,' Burr (R-N.C.) said in a brief interview. 'The first iteration of the report is out for declassification right now. I can't tell you how long that takes. I'm hopeful we'll push that out in a couple weeks.'"

-- Follow the money: A former top strategist for John Kasich's 2016 presidential campaign registered as a foreign agent and plans to lobby against potential sanctions on Russia. John Weaver will lobby on behalf of a subsidiary of Rosatom, a Russian state-owned nuclear energy company, in an attempt to influence Congress and the administration on sanctions or other restrictions "in the area of atomic (nuclear) energy, trade or cooperation involving in any way the Russian Federation." The six-month contract is worth $350,000, plus expenses, with an option to extend if necessary, per Politico.

Trump cites killing of Calif. officer in call for border wall

THE IMMIGRATION WARS:

-- Trump is expected to express support for a "merit-based" immigration system, as proposed by his son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner, in a Rose Garden speech today. David Nakamura and Ashley Parker report: "The proposal, previewed by Kushner and other Trump aides in private briefings on Capitol Hill over the past week, already is facing skepticism from lawmakers in

both political parties, and there appears to be no clear path toward advancing the plan through Congress. … But White House aides emphasized that Trump is enthusiastically on board with an effort to demonstrate that he endorses legal immigration to help American companies even as he has railed against other groups, including immigrant families seeking asylum and refugees."

-- Trump's new plan makes it clear that he wants more highly skilled immigrants who speak English and have job offers. Abigail Hauslohner reports: "The administration wants doctors, nurses, engineers and computer programmers; 'individuals who provide a cure for cancer or build that first subdivision on Mars,' the official said. It wants the next Nelson Mandela. … Immigrant hopefuls would be deemed eligible and competitive based on the points they accrue through a set of criteria, including educational specialty or degree, age, English proficiency and high-salaried job offer. **They would need to show that they 'like our way of life,' a senior official said, and that they are capable of 'patriotic assimilation.'** They could demonstrate that quality by passing a civics test much like the kind someone might encounter at a U.S. college. …

"**Critics say a point-based system is impractical and runs counter to the basic laws of economics.** 'My read on this now is that this type of proposed system would

recruit skilled engineers, but not skilled farmworkers,' said Ali Noorani, executive director of the National Immigration Forum, an immigration advocacy group. 'The fact is, our economy needs both.' Another expert … said the new system would rank people based on how talented they are as opposed to the current system, which has employers requesting individual people from other countries and explaining specifically why they need them. … Administration officials didn't address how the points breakdown would work or whether there would be a minimum number of points that would make people eligible for visas."

-- A 2½-year-old Guatemalan boy who was apprehended at the border died in El Paso after several weeks in the hospital. Maria Sacchetti and Robert Moore report: "The boy is the fourth migrant child to die since December after being apprehended at the southern border and taken to the hospital. All have been from Guatemala … The Washington Post confirmed the death with two sources, including Guatemala's Consul Tekandi Paniagua, who covers the El Paso area. Another source confirmed the death on the condition of anonymity. Paniagua said the boy, who had spent three days in federal custody, appeared to have developed a form of pneumonia, but the death remains under investigation. The El Paso medical examiner's office and the hospital declined to comment."

-- The governor of New Mexico is paying to bus migrants from border towns to cities like Denver and Dallas, where they're cared for by a network of churches. Robert Moore reports: "A busload of 55 migrants who had been arrested by U.S. border authorities and were then released into the United States left Las Cruces, N.M., on Sunday afternoon bound for Denver, where it arrived at about 2 a.m. Monday and left people in the care of three churches, according to the office of New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham (D), which paid $4,000 for the bus to help ease the burden on cities in the southern part of the state. … Although the cost of the first bus to Denver was borne by New Mexico taxpayers, Lujan Grisham spokeswoman Claudia Tristán said the governor's office is seeking philanthropic help to pay for future buses."

French President Emmanuel Macron and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern meet with tech leaders to demand that the companies stop acts of violent extremism from being shown online. (Charles Platiau/AP)

BIG TECH IN THE CROSSHAIRS:

-- The White House will not back a New Zealand-led effort to curb extremism online amid free speech concerns. Tony Romm and Drew Harwell report: "Leaders from across the globe, including British Prime Minister Theresa May … and Jordan's King Abdullah II,

signed the ‘Christchurch Call,’ which was unveiled at a gathering in Paris that had been organized by French President Emmanuel Macron and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. Amazon, Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Twitter also signed on to the document, pledging to work more closely with one another and governments to make certain their sites do not become conduits for terrorism. … The governments pledged to counter online extremism, including through new regulation, and to ‘encourage media outlets to apply ethical standards when depicting terrorist events online.’ The companies agreed to accelerate research and information sharing with governments in the wake of recent terrorist attacks. … But the White House opted against endorsing the effort, and [Trump] did not join the other leaders in Paris. The White House felt the document could present constitutional concerns, officials there said, potentially conflicting with the First Amendment.”

-- The decision not to join came as the White House, tapping into Trump’s claim that tech giants are biased against conservatives, escalated its war against Facebook, Google and Twitter by asking users to share their stories of censorship on these platforms. Tony Romm reports: “The effort, which the White House said on Twitter was directed at users ‘no matter your views,’ seeks to collect names, contact information and other details from Americans. The survey asks whether they have encountered problems on Facebook,

Instagram, Google-owned YouTube, Twitter or other social media sites — companies the president frequently takes aim at for alleged political censorship. The survey claims that 'too many Americans have seen their accounts suspended, banned, or fraudulently reported for unclear 'violations' of user policies.'"

-- Anti-Semitic searches on Google spiked after the attack on the Tree of Life synagogue, which left 11 people dead. Research found that anti-Semitic searches were at their highest point in the past 12 months shortly after the Pittsburgh massacre. (CNN)

-- Twitter is working on a plan to get people to stop yelling at one another on its platform. From BuzzFeed News's Nicole Nguyen: Twitter "launched a separate app, 'twttr,' as an external, public prototype to experiment with new features it's considering rolling out on Twitter itself; a way to test things in public. … 'Little t' twttr is a part of the company's grand plan to treat the platform's underlying issues, rather than just its symptoms. The idea is that what it learns from small-t twttr will help big Twitter foster conversations, rather than outrage. … The twttr team began by testing what happens if the app more clearly shows who's replying to whom. They also hid likes and retweet counts — Twitter's primary incentives — behind a tap to put the primary focus on reply text. Now they were about to see, for the first time, what people thought. Some of that initial feedback said that the bubbly design made

Twitter feel more like a chat, and that it was easier to understand who was responding to what."

-- Meanwhile, China banned Wikipedia in all languages. The Wikimedia Foundation, which hosts the site, said it was given "no notice" that its platform would be shut off in China. (Rachel Siegel)

Daniel Elwell, acting administrator of the FAA, listens during a House aviation subcommittee hearing on the status of Boeing's 737 Max jet. (Andrew Harrer/Bloomberg News)

THE REST OF THE DOMESTIC AGENDA:

-- The outgoing chief of the Federal Aviation Administration said key decisions made by pilots contributed to the crashes of two 737 Boeing Max jets in Indonesia and Ethiopia. Michael Laris, Lori Aratani and Ashley Halsey III report: "An automated anti-stall feature on the 737 Max activated when it wasn't supposed to in the October crash in Indonesia, acting FAA Administrator Daniel K. Elwell said at a House hearing. That sent the plane's nose down repeatedly. The pilots should have responded by turning off the motors to the part of the airplane that was forcing it downward, but they did not, Elwell said. When the same automated feature, known as the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System, mistakenly kicked in less than five months later on the 737 Max involved in the Ethiopia crash, the pilots 'didn't adhere to the emergency' directive issued by the FAA in November, Elwell said."

-- The Federal Communications Commission proposed granting major telecom carriers the ability to block suspected spam calls from ringing customers' phones. Tony Romm reports: "The idea put forward by FCC Chairman Ajit Pai … encourages carriers to enable their anti-robocall technology by default, as opposed to waiting for consumers to turn on those features themselves. Currently, consumers often must elect to use carriers' robocall-blocking tools, some of them

costing a monthly fee … While the chairman said the agency is going to 'encourage companies to offer this for free,' the FCC's forthcoming directive does not require them to do so. … The agency also plans to use the order to encourage AT&T, Verizon and others to develop tools that limit the calls a consumer can receive to only the contacts in their phones, a technical restriction that Pai said could help certain smartphone owners, such as the elderly, who are most at risk of fraud."

-- The House passed the bipartisan tribal casino bill that Trump urged Republicans to oppose last week because he thought it would benefit Elizabeth Warren. Felicia Sonmez reports: "The bill, H.R. 312, passed on a 275-to-146 vote, with 47 Republicans crossing party lines to join all but two Democrats present in voting in favor. It would confirm the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe's sovereignty over 321 acres of land, including the Taunton, Mass., site eyed for the casino project. … The potential Mashpee casino site is not far from two Rhode Island casinos run by Twin River Worldwide Holdings, a public company with strong Trump ties. The company has hired American Conservative Union Chairman Matthew Schlapp, a vocal Trump supporter, to lobby for it on the land issue. Schlapp's wife, Mercedes, is director of strategic communications at the White House."

-- The White House has been systematically wiping information about Obamacare from government

websites over the past two years. Wired's Issie Lapowsky reports: "Looking at sites administered by the Department for Health and Human Services, [a new report] documents 26 instances in which information related to the Affordable Care Act was substantially altered or removed. Some of the changes were subtle. Others, including the disappearance of an 85-page website devoted to the ACA, were sweeping. Taken together, the researchers argue, the modifications are tantamount to government censorship and point to an increasing need for oversight of government websites."

-- The White House has been working on a strategy to force greater disclosure of prices across much of the health-care industry. The Wall Street Journal's Stephanie Armour reports: "The administration is strongly interested in forcing insurers to publicize the negotiated rates they pay for services, the people said. The requirement could affect insurers providing coverage in the private-employer market, where about 158 million people get their health insurance. The White House also wants doctors and hospitals to give patients their total price of care before they get services or treatment whether or not the health-care provider is in the patient's insurance network, said the people familiar with the discussions. … The White House believes it can use a number of executive tools to push its agenda on transparency. One possibility: new requirements in a 2019 proposed rule on hospital outpatient payments. The Labor

Department also could compel disclosure of negotiated amounts insurers pay for services, according to the people familiar with the discussions."

-- Sen. Ted Cruz (R) of Texas argued that Trump's proposed Space Force is needed to prevent attacks from space pirates: "Since the ancient Greeks first put to sea, nations have recognized the necessity of naval forces and maintaining a superior capability to protect waterborne travel and commerce from bad actors … Pirates threaten the open seas, and the same is possible in space. In this same way, I believe we too must now recognize the necessity of a Space Force to defend the nation and to protect space commerce and civil space exploration." (The Hill)

Hatice Cengiz, the fiancee of the slain Jamal Khashoggi, struggles to keep her composure during a public appearance in London last October. (John Stillwell/PA/AP)

THE NEW WORLD ORDER:

-- Jamal Khashoggi's fiancee criticized the Trump administration's response to his killing. Greg Miller reports: "Khashoggi 'had always championed the U.S.' as the place you went 'to challenge the status quo and speak truth to power,' Hatice Cengiz said in a meeting

Wednesday with Washington Post journalists. 'Jamal would have been most disappointed of all to see the U.S. response.' Cengiz's remarks are her strongest statement to date on the Trump administration's muted reaction to a killing that was widely condemned as an attack on press freedoms and a brazen violation of human rights." Cengiz is scheduled to testify to a House subcommittee today.

-- The Philippines recalled its ambassador and consuls to Canada after Ottawa failed to take back tons of unwanted trash that's been rotting near Manila for years. Amanda Coletta reports: "The dispute began in 2013, when Chronic Inc., a private Canadian company, shipped more than 100 containers labeled as plastics to the Philippines for recycling. A spot inspection by customs officials found that only about one-third of them were recyclable. The rest were crammed to the brim with household waste, including old wires and soiled, leaking adult diapers. … Canada tried to get the Philippines to dispose of the garbage without success. Then, in 2016, a Philippine court ordered Chronic to take the waste back, noting that the country was not a 'trash bin.'"

-- Venezuelan government and opposition leaders are headed to Norway for talks. It's still unclear whether the representatives for both sides will meet or if Norwegian officials will serve as intermediaries to explore possible resolutions for Venezuela's political crisis. (Rick Noack)

-- The Trump administration asked Congress for money to reimburse Afghanistan's Taliban for travel expenses to and from peace talk meetings. From Roll Call's John M. Donnelly: "The money would cover the Taliban's costs for expenses such as transportation, lodging, food and supplies, said Kevin Spicer, spokesman for Indiana Democrat Peter J. Visclosky, in a statement for CQ Roll Call. … The Pentagon's request to funnel U.S. funds to the Taliban 'would implicate provisions of law concerning material support to terrorists, the Taliban's ongoing offensive operations against U.S. service members, and their continuing lack of acknowledgement of the government of Afghanistan or the rights of women in Afghan society,' said Spicer."

-- Mexico City is enacting emergency regulations to combat a sharp rise in air pollution caused by brush fires that have covered the city with heavy smoke in recent days. The Wall Street Journal's Anthony Harrup reports: "Mexico's capital stepped up restrictions on traffic, closed schools and curbed outdoor activities … Environmental officials suspended some public works and prohibited certain construction-related activities that could send more particles into the air."

-- A 28-year-old widow is mounting a campaign for a seat in India's Parliament after her husband was one of tens of thousands of farmers to die by suicide in the country — a bid that symbolizes a growing

discontent in India's rural areas. Joanna Slater reports: "That dissatisfaction could determine the outcome of India's national poll, which concludes next week. Polls suggest that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will win reelection over an invigorated opposition, but rural voters — whose views tend to show up less in surveys and in the media — have upended electoral predictions in the past."

-- A Guatemalan court ruled that anti-corruption crusader Thelma Aldana can't run in next month's presidential election. Sandra Cuffe and Mary Beth Sheridan report: "Four years ago, Aldana, then the attorney general, led an investigation of official graft that ousted the president. But now, Aldana is the one facing corruption charges. Aldana's supporters — including U.S. and Guatemala civil society groups — say the charges against her are trumped up. The 63-year-old lawyer, they say, was part of a remarkable, U.S.-backed effort in recent years to tackle corruption in this poor nation. But her attempted run for president in the June 16 general elections prompted a fierce backlash by politicians and others who benefited from the old system."

-- "Vice President Pence, a fervent defender of [Trump's] nationalistic foreign policy, delivered a eulogy Wednesday for Richard G. Lugar, whose career was the definition of moderate Republican internationalism," Robert Costa reports. "While Pence

heaped praise on the former senator from Indiana and called him an ‘American statesman,’ he did not address the yawning gap between the worldviews of Trump and the late lawmaker. Pence, a former Indiana governor, instead talked of how a legendary pair of Indiana leaders had passed — and left aside churning GOP debates. … Pence’s careful speech, made before pillars of the political establishment who sat solemnly in the front row of the church, was the latest example the vice president’s often uneasy charge: reassuring traditional Republicans and connecting with them on broad themes of faith and service — without ever distancing himself from Trump.”

SOCIAL MEDIA SPEED READ:

This is how the New York Post reacted to Bill de Blasio's news:

A NY1 reporter shared some New Yorkers reactions to the news that their mayor might run for president:

Trump also reacted to his hometown mayor getting into the 2020 race:

And he dismissed reports that there has been infighting among his advisers about the administration's Iran policy:

This 2011 tweet recirculated as tensions escalated with Iran:

The Onion shared this headline:

Rubio downplayed concerns about starting a war with Iran:

A conservative writer for National Review who served in Iraq is not convinced:

A Post reporter shared this progression:

The chief strategist on Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential campaign shared this thought on the Alabama abortion bill:

A spokeswoman for the Human Rights Campaign added:

A newly declared Democratic presidential candidate basked in the media attention on the campaign trail:

Another 2020 candidate shared this personal grooming tip:

ORourke's live-streamed haircut drew mockery from a 2020 rival:

And a Post reporter tweeted this bit of color from Capitol Hill:

GOOD READS:

-- "A mystery illness killed a boy in 1969. Years later, doctors learned what it was: AIDS," by Steve Hendrix: "The 16-year-old boy had the kind of illness that wouldn't be familiar to doctors for years: He was weak and emaciated, rife with stubborn infections and riddled with rare cancerous lesions known as Kaposi's sarcoma, a skin disease found in elderly men of Mediterranean descent. The boy, Robert Rayford, died on May 15, 1969,

in St. Louis. It would be more than a decade before doctors started seeing similar cases among gay men in New York and California. In 1982, with the numbers of sick surging, the disease got a name: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The AIDS epidemic had begun. But the mystery of Robert R. — as he was long known to researchers — would linger in the minds of the physicians who had cared for him."

-- The New York Times, "In Flood-Hit Midwest, Mayors See Climate Change as a Subject Best Avoided," by Mitch Smith and John Schwartz: "Across the Midwest this spring, floods have submerged farms and stores, split open levees and, in some places, left people stranded for days or weeks. The disasters have renewed national attention on how climate change can exacerbate flooding and how cities can prepare for a future with more extreme weather. But in some of the hardest-hit areas, where bolstering flood protection and helping the displaced are popular bipartisan causes, there is little appetite for bringing climate change — and the political baggage it carries — into the discussion."

-- BuzzFeed News, "These Conservatives Want To Stop Fighting LGBT People," by Dominic Holden: "Their campaign is growing more urgent as House Democrats prepare to pass the Equality Act later this week, which will be celebrated, at least briefly, as a milestone for the nation's boldest LGBT rights bill. But in

the Republican-controlled Senate, the ride will stop. This faction of conservatives thinks they can strike a deal. Despite the rising monolith of religious conservatism against LGBT rights under President Donald Trump, strategists within this movement tell BuzzFeed News they've been working with Senate Republicans to introduce a bill this year that would both create new federal LGBT rights and add religious exemptions — an alternative to the Equality Act. They contend an unwavering war on homosexuality and transgender people is a losing battle. Not only does it distract from religious liberty protections they want to win, but refusing to budge on LGBT rights now could set them back further in the future."

-- Politico, "'Get Scavino in here': Trump's Twitter guru is the ultimate insider," by Andrew Restuccia, Daniel Lippman and Eliana Johnson: "With few allies left in the West Wing, Trump frequently leans on his unassuming social media guru for affirmation and advice about how his most sensitive policies will be received, according to interviews with more than two dozen current and former White House officials, and others close to the president. [Dan] Scavino met Trump as a 16-year-old golf caddie and has spent much of his adult life by his side. Today he sits just feet from the Oval Office and is present at most meetings, tapping away on his laptop in the background. He has joined Trump on trips to Saudi Arabia, Argentina and other far-flung destinations. …

Scavino holds what would be a second-tier job in any other administration. But in Trump's world it comes with the top White House salary of $179,700, coveted assistant to the president status and, as of last month, an upgraded title: senior advisor for digital strategy."

HOT ON THE LEFT:

"'This is a war for our culture': Sebastian Gorka anguished by gay wedding on 'Arthur,'" from Isaac Stanley-Becker: "Sebastian Gorka, the former Breitbart editor and White House aide, goes live every weekday from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern time on the Salem Radio Network. On Tuesday, he provided a new raison d'etre for 'America First' … The reason? The 22nd season of 'Arthur,' the

HOT ON THE RIGHT:

"Brzezinski urges Warren to do Fox News town hall: Candidates should be able to 'walk into any fire,'" from the Hill: "MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski on Wednesday urged [Elizabeth Warren] to agree to a Fox News town hall after the 2020 presidential hopeful turned the network down. The 'Morning Joe' co-host argued that a candidate 'should be able to walk into any situation, walk into

animated children's series about an anthropomorphic aardvark. Gorka, who brandished the insignia of a historically Nazi-aligned Hungarian group called the Vitezi Rend at an inauguration ball in January 2017, flew into a rage because the season's Monday premiere featured a gay wedding. Arthur's third-grade teacher, Nigel Ratburn, exchanges vows with a local chocolatier, an aardvark named Patrick. 'This is a war for our culture, and that's why we exist here, on 'America First,' on the Salem Radio Network,' Gorka said."

any fire' and answer questions if they hope to be elected. The comment comes the day after Warren publicly declined a Fox News town hall invitation while calling the network a 'hate-for-profit racket.' … 'I would argue that a presidential candidate should be able to walk into any situation, walk into any fire, and have the confidence and the ability to put it out by spreading the democratic values and his or her beliefs,' she [said]. 'And I think they should go into Fox and do all the town halls they can do because Fox, you could argue, is smart to be doing these."

DAYBOOK:

Trump will meet with the Swiss president and receive his intelligence briefing before giving a speech on immigration. He will later travel to New York for a roundtable with supporters and a fundraising dinner.

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

Kamala Harris shut down talks of her becoming Joe Biden's running mate by suggesting that the former vice president should serve as her No. 2: "If people want to speculate about running mates, I encourage that, because I think that Joe Biden would be a great running mate," Harris said in New Hampshire. "As vice president, he's proven that he knows how to do the job." (CNN)

NEWS YOU CAN USE IF YOU LIVE IN D.C.:

-- Early showers will be followed by fresh spring weather. The Capital Weather Gang forecasts: "Spring's finest weather is on display today, but summer makes a guest appearance this weekend. While not a scorcher or

a sweat fest, it will be a jolt after our relatively benign spring weather to date. And while a thundershower is ever possible this weekend, it is definitely the exception and not the rule."

-- The Nationals beat the Mets 5-1. (Jesse Dougherty)

-- Metro will temporarily stop issuing citations for fare evasion in the District because of a problem with the language of a new city law that decriminalizes these violations. Paul Duggan reports: "In an effort to clarify how the new law should work, the D.C. Council last week unanimously passed emergency legislation that is awaiting the signature of Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D). Once the legislation takes effect, the transit agency said, it will lift the enforcement suspension imposed by Metro Police Chief Ron Pavlik. Pavlik's order applies only to violations that occur inside D.C. city limits. Tickets will still be issued in the Metro system in Virginia and Maryland."

-- A landmark education bill in Maryland that outlines a plan to reshape the state's public school system and give an additional $855 million to schools over the next two years will become a law without Gov. Larry Hogan's signature. Ovetta Wiggins reports: "In a letter to presiding officers, Hogan said he would allow the bill, which adopts recommendations made by the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, to become law despite having 'serious

concerns.' Hogan (R) said the legislation lacks a long-term funding source or enough accountability to prevent 'highly funded but failing and underperforming schools.' … Hogan also announced Wednesday that he released $255 million in additional education funding for fiscal 2020, money that will pay for the initial implementation of the recommendations. … Hogan's decision to allow the bill to become law without his signature does not come as a surprise. The governor has been vocal in his criticism of the price tag of the plan."

-- The Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington will be renamed. WTOP's Max Smith reports: "'Jefferson Davis had no known connection to this region …. and the very designation…was a direct and antagonistic response to the proposed Lincoln Highway,' Arlington County Board Chair Christian Dorsey said. It symbolized white supremacy in a Jim Crow south, Dorsey said. Dorsey emphasized that Arlington has pressed for the change for years — even before the 2017 attack in Charlottesville — and that the road will now have the same name from Fort Belvoir to the Potomac."

VIDEOS OF THE DAY:

Stephen Colbert doesn't believe male lawmakers in Alabama understand how babies are made:

Kamala Harris talked about her education proposals with Samantha Bee:

Bee also mourned Barr's integrity with a bagpipe performance:

Elizabeth Warren sparred with a Treasury official:

And Mick Jagger showed off his dance moves just a month after having heart surgery:

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